

Castlemaine Naturalist

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**From the Field Nats Get-together
Sept. 18 – 20 1998**

MUCKLEFORD FOREST AND SMITHS REEF (Leaders, Ken and Maureen Dredge)

Despite unfavourable weather predictions, five car loads of enthusiastic Field Nats headed off at 9.30am to explore part of our local Box-Ironbark forest. Our group included visitors from all parts of Victoria – Warnambool, Melbourne, Mildura and the North-east.

Our trip covered many of the local landmarks, including "the Dam", the Red, White and Blue Mine, the Quince Tree and Gower School, all of which provided a good variety of both birds and wildflowers.

The Quince Tree proved to be the best birding site, with all members getting good views of an Olive Whistler, only the second sighting for the area. Also present were a pair of White-bellied (Little) Cuckoo-shrikes.

The Red White and Blue track not only provided a wonderful variety of wildflowers, but also three sightings of the elusive Swift Parrots, and the calling of the crested Bellbird and Olive-backed Oriole.

A total of 70 species was recorded, which was very pleasing as quite a few of the "regulars" were missing.

It was unfortunate that we did not get a wildflower and plant list handed in, but that was an extensive list including Pink Fingers, Wax-lip Orchid, Blue Caledenia, Leopard Orchid, Greenhoods, Golden Diurus, Flame Heath, and Sticky Boronia to name but a few.

We were very fortunate that we only had one heavy shower of rain. The rest of the day was pleasant with some sunshine making it a wonderful day's outing.

Ken Dredge.

* Two Cape Barren Geese - in a paddock on School Road!!! (I've heard a rumour that there were some chooks, too! Ed)

WALK TO COBBLERS GULLY AND THE MONK

(Leaders, Ern and Leslie Perkins)

* At the Monk, 7 Crimson Spider Orchids (*Caledonia concolor*) in full flower on either side of the track.

NORTH BRITISH MINE AND MT. TARRENGOWER

(Leader, Maggie Oliver)

Magpies, Willie Wagtail, Grey Thrush, Swallows, Pardalotes (Striated), Kookaburras heard, Buff-rumped Thornbills, Blackbird and Wrens.

Saw Pink Fingers, Prickly Pears, some under attack - by *Cactoblastus* beetle? - wild geranium (*Magenta Storks*bill) leaves, bracken, sedum succulents, yellow daisy, onion weathering on beautiful rocks, and moss, Chocolate lilies and bunny shooters!

ZOe

FRYERS RIDGE EXCURSION

(Leader, George Broadway)

Approximately 27 brave souls fronted up on the Saturday morning prepared to face the perils of the Fryers Ridge road. The convoy consisted of 10 cars and in the busy Saturday morning traffic it was difficult to make an accurate count before passing through Chewton. Past the Wattle Gully Mine the floral display along the Chewton-Fryerstown road was noted, especially as we passed through the cuttings, where *Eriostemons* and *Tetratheca* were much in evidence. There, however, was not a good place to stop.

The convoy turned off to pass along the front of 'Lambruk' at Fryerstown, so that participants could have a good look, then along the Taradale Track before turning onto the Old Lookout Tower Track. Here was made the first stop at the base of a steep hill where there was an excellent display of *Leucopogon ericoides* (Pink Beard-heath) in flower, but unfortunately not much else except the promise of more flowers later in the Spring.

The steep and rough climb was negotiated with extreme care before stopping again at the top of the climb where there was more to see. In addition to *L. ericoides*, here was also *L. fletcheri* (Twin Flower Beard-heath). Also *Dilwynia ramosissima* (Parrot-pea) was making quite a show as was *Acacia oxycedrus* (Spike Wattle) and *A. gunnii* (Ploughshare Wattle). So, too, was *A. lanigera* (Woolly Wattle).

The convoy then proceeded to the junction with Fryers Ranges Road where there was a spectacular display of *Epacris impressa* (Common Heath), showing a full range of colours from pure white through shades of pink to deep red. The Broad-leaf Peppermint (*E. dives*) was in full flower and made a glorious backdrop. The occasional orchid was found here, too. As the clouds were by now very threatening no time was lost in pouring the morning tea, and the scones were much appreciated. There was now no more time for further stops, so the tour continued to the junction of the Irishtown Track which was followed back to Irishtown, then to Campbells Creek and so back to the Gardens just a little bit later than the anticipated time of arrival.

George Broadway

* Three Spotted Quail-thrush seen on the Fryers Ridge/Taradale road.

VAUGHAN SPRINGS EXCURSION

(Leader, Margaret Badminton)

The Springs, following 6mm of overnight rain, produced ideal conditions for bird observations with great activity and a chorus of bird calls on arrival. Although 11 people elected to commence the 1.7km walk to central Springs, excitement at seeing so much bird life along the way meant that we gradually left small groups 'rooted' to a certain 'good spot', agreeing to meet for morning tea at the rotunda. A sharp shower of rain couldn't have been better timed as we compiled our combined bird list there. Then, on to the dam above the Springs where we were lucky to have the use of a telescope brought along by June Risdon of Mildura. What wonderful detail we could see, especially of a Coot on its nest. This left only a limited time at Glenluce with no different sightings.

For the morning we had a list of 31 different species.

Margaret Badminton

* At Vaughan Springs - Superb Blue Wren, Grey Fantail, Horsfields Bronze Cuckoo, Fantailed Cuckoo(h), White-browed Scrubwren, Red-browed Firetail, Yellow Robin, Grey Shrike-thrush, New Holland, Yellow-tufted, White-naped, Yellow-faced and Fuscous Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebill, Striated and Spotted Pardalotes, Crested Shrike-tit, Crimson Rosella, Australian Raven, Long-billed Corella, Blackbird, Little Eagle, Whistling Kite, Brown Goshawk.

* At the dam - Eurasian Coot, Dusky Moorhen, Masked Lapwing, Australasian Grebe, Black-fronted Plover, Pacific Black Duck, Welcome Swallow.

WATTLE FLAT BUSH

(Leader, Rita Mills)

A convoy of 14 cars carrying 35 people headed off to the nearby Wattle Flat bush with one eye on the weather, but although we had a shower or two the weather stayed mainly fine, and actually was sunny for the last half of the walk. Because of the dry conditions over the last 15 months or so the bush really wasn't at its best, but those who went were delighted with it. Gold Dust wattle was in profusion, and quite a lot of rough Wattle was also in flower. The starry flowers of White Marianth were still to be found, but we only saw one or two plants of Fairy Wax. The Goldfields Grevillea (*G. dryophilla*) was just coming into flower, and there were quite a few flowers on *G. alpina*. The orchids found were Nodding, Dwarf and Blunt Greenhoods, a few Waxlips, lots of Leopard Orchids (*Diurus pardina*) and Pink Fingers, while just off Escape Track we found a number of Gnat Orchids (*Cyrtostylus reniformis*) in an area where, before much of the sandstone outcropping rock was removed, hundreds could be found each year in late winter and early spring.

A few birds were seen despite the number of people on the outing. I recorded Striated and Buff-rumped Thornbills, Grey Shrike-thrush, Grey Currawong, White-winged Chough, Grey Fantail, Rufous Whistler, Crimson Rosella and Little Raven.

Rita Mills

FRYERSTOWN TOUR

(Leader, Frank Duffin)

Take an overcast sky, our dark bush and over the ground, at shin level, drifts of Fairy Wax. To come across this scene in early spring when these small shrubs are in flower, the brilliance of their white stars creating an unforgettable picture, is pure delight. For those who followed Frank Duffin on the Sunday morning Fryerstown tour this was *the* highlight of many highlights. After leaving Chewton we had stopped to view the Escott grave, and a few metres on we came across this lovely sight.

This tour is comprehensively described in a Castlemaine Field Naturalists' leaflet. Frank, in only a few hours, ushered the car convoy to many of the listed features - plus one or two more. Over the 43 km tour was seen the changing landforms and bush created by both nature and man.

The visitors had their appetites whetted, and those asked expressed a desire to return and repeat the experience as a day long tour.

Lloyd Curtis

THE DAWN BREAKFAST, KALIMNA POINT

(Leader, Maggie Oliver)

At 6am the weather was calm and overcast with a fine, soft drizzle falling, but about 12 or 14 people braved the early hour and the rain to 'sort of' watch the dawn. Shortly after the dawn was supposed to appear they made their way across the road and up to the rotunda for breakfast, and were opening their various hampers and tuckerboxes when ZOe arrived with a big pot of steaming hot porridge, along with sugar, honey, milk, bowls and spoons! Everyone tucked in to a right royal breakfast - with seconds - to the chorus of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, a White-browed Scrubwren, a flirting Grey Fantail, and the hooting of a Common Bronzewing. Absolutely delightful.

From a verbal report by
Maggie Oliver.

MOUNT ALEXANDER

(Leader, Margaret Hunter)

Sunday morning wasn't really very promising for an outing, but still quite a few of our visitors joined Margaret on the excursion out to Mount Alexander. She took us to visit their own property to have a look at the granite and some ancient Manna Gums on the property, explaining some of hers and Mark's aims with land care, while Yellow-faced Honeyeaters flew in and out of the Lucerne Trees. One of our visitors, a retired Geologist, was a great source of information on things geological and botanical.

Next stop was near the old school pine plantation to have a look at the ruins of the historic Silkworm Farm, then up to the picnic area near the new Koala Park for morning tea. It was already getting late, and the weather was threatening, so we decided not to do any of the walk after all, but instead we went on up to the Dog Rocks. Our visitors were very impressed by these great granite tors, and made us realise how much we take for granted in our own district.

From there we headed up to Langs Lookout to take in the view, but we drove up into the cloud as we approached the top of the Mount, so, no doubt the view was still there, but we didn't see any of it, but the trees in the mist are always a delightful sight I think. By the comments, many others do, too. It also made us more aware of what was close to us, like a tree growing out of a rock., which it has split in pieces as the tree grew. The process would have been helped by water getting into the small cracks, and expanding when it had frozen.

Rita Mills

* Superb Blue Wrens, Willie Wagtail and Scarlet Robin at the Faraday School site

THE MONK AND EUREKA

(Leader, Chris Morris)

To the Monk we set a pace
Trav'ling by the water race;
Cheery band of near a score
Led by Chris - Oh what we
saw!

Orchids crimson, spider-like,
Greenhoods nodding - worth
the hike -
Purple ones with lips of wax.
Sad evidence of woodman's
axe.

Bright fingers pink and pale rock fern,
Too soon for home we had to turn.
Creamy Candles showed the way.
Despite the damp - a perfect day!
Natalie de Maccus

BABBLINGS FROM BARKERS CREEK N° 11

Travelling North — and Back

One of the nice things about being on holidays is that you see new places, new plants and new birds, as well as having the time to notice and observe at leisure.

One of the first birds we noticed as we travelled North into Queensland was the Brahminy kite, a fairly large bird in size, about 50 cm, with a wing span of 125 cm, but it is its colouring that catches the eye. The head, neck and breast are white, while the body and upper surface of the flight feathers are chestnut. As this bird soars above the coastline, particularly in the evening twilight, this changing parade of colours seems to sparkle.

They are one of the few birds that use seaweed in their nests.

Another bird with wonderful colours and interesting nesting habit is the Sunbird. Its common name is Yellow-bellied Sunbird. Quite small in size, around 10 - 12 cm, they are olive-yellow above and deep yellow below, while their chin to lower breast is a dark metallic purple or blue. They have a long, curved, black beak. These birds are very active and pugnacious, and seem to be unafraid of humans.

Their nest building habit is fascinating, as the nest is like a suspended under-inflated balloon, with side entrance. A Sunbird, for example, nested and fledged its young from a nest, made primarily from woven cobwebs and suspended from an indoor plant, in the lounge of our son's home. The Sunbird regularly flew in through the open window to both build its nest and later to feed its young. This happened irrespective of those present or what the people in the room were doing.

While on a three day sailing cruise through the Witsunday Passage, we went ashore on South Mole for a cup of coffee and sat near the foreshore in a local coffee shop to drink. After sitting there for some time looking out to sea, there appeared, in the corner of our vision, a small movement amongst the bushes near our chairs. Suddenly those china-like garden sculptures moved again and for the first time we became aware that we were sitting within two feet of three Bush Stone-curlews. Bird books mention their rigid stance, but this does not convey their absolute stillness, as if frozen in time and place and blending so well with their surroundings. It gave us a wonderful opportunity to observe them, their colouring, beak shape and their large eyes.

On the way back home to Castlemaine we rounded a corner to find a Wedge-tailed Eagle mounted over a roadside kill. While it watched us closely it did not move from its feed. We have not had an occasion like this before when we could remain so close to this bird of the open sky. They look so majestic wheeling there overhead, but on the ground, close up, they are even more dominating, assured and in control of their environment.

John Turnbull.

61 Hunter St., September '98

The prolific flowering of the grevilleas this season has attracted several members of the honeyeater family. In addition to the usual New Holland and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Eastern Spinebills I have observed for the first time in my garden a White-eared Honeyeater at the bath and feeding on the adjacent grevillea (Purinda Scarlet).

The Red Wattlebirds have been particularly aggressive and menacing to all birds visiting the blossom on the Blue Mallet eucalypt. The parrots seem to cope quite well, but unfortunately our pardolote nesting box is in close proximity to this tree, and I found an adult bird dead almost immediately underneath, with wounds which suggested it had been attacked and grasped in a strong beak, possibly a wattlebird's. This was a second attempt to breed - the first had been more successful and the young were flexing their wings and learning to fly when we arrived home at the end of August. The box is now deserted, but the male is still calling daily from the surrounding trees.

Silvereyes, Goldfinches and the Yellow-rumped Thornbills all visit the garden to bathe and feed as usual, and the Rufopus Whistlers are back again.

Shirley Parnaby.

Other Observations

* 14 dead Foxes on a farm fence north east of Bendigo. D. MacAldrick.

* Pallid Cuckoo Calling at Harcourt 10/9. Brenda Envall.

C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.

Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Fri Oct 9 **Spiders**. Speaker is Jenny Shield. UCA Hall 8pm.

Sat Oct 10 **Barfold Gorge**. Leave CHIRP, 13 Mostyn St, at 1.30pm. Take suitable footwear for rough walking, binocs, afternoon tea.

Fri. 16 to Sun 18 Oct. **V.F.N.C.A. Campout at Warnambool**.

Fri. Nov. 13 **Heaths**. Speaker is Hillary Weatherhead. UCA hall 8pm.

Sat Nov 14. **Terrick Terrick**. All day outing. The day will include a guided tour of the adjoining native grasslands arranged by Shirley Diez of DNRE. Leave 27 Doveton St. at 9.30am. Take lunch and afternoon tea, binoculars, etc.

Fri Dec 11 **Members and Visitors Night**. Your night to contribute! "Bring a Plate" supper.

Sat Dec 12 **Tullaroop Res. Picnic Tea?** Final arrangements made on Fri 11 taking the weather forecast into account.

WEDNESDAY WALKS. Leave 27 Doveton St at 4pm. These walks are to local areas and last about an hour.

7 Oct, Leader G. Broadway.

14 Oct, Leader A. Dorman.

21 Oct, Leader F. Cincotta.

GDT PUBLIC WALKS Sat 31/10/98, 9am. O'Briens Crossing to Blackwood. Meet O'Briens Crossing, O'Briens trk via Blackwood. Rated Medium. Leader Merv Kew. It is essential to contact Ed Butler (5348 3059) 4 days prior to book in for the walk. You will be expected to help with the car shuffle to get people home. Suitable footwear and clothing, drinks and snacks essential.

Committee; G. Broadway (Pres.), M. Dredge (V.P.), B. Maund (Sec.), M. Badminton (Treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), J. Turnbull, M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, E. Perkins.

Subscriptions - Ordinary membership: Single \$16, Family \$24

Pensioner/student: Single \$12, Family \$18 Supporting : \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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